

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a 36-41 Ps. 116 1Pet. 1:17-23 Lk. 24

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church April 19, 2026

When I was a child living out in the cornfields of Illinois, my only playmates were rough and tumble boys with whom I would ride bikes, build forts in the woods, and make rafts to float down Ferson Creek. All of these activities providing ample opportunity for cuts and scrapes, which seemed to find their way to my elbows and knees with some regularity...

And while I would just as soon have ignored those dirt-filled, gravel-ground wounds, as soon as my mother saw them, she would march me into her bathroom where the first-aid supplies were kept, put down the lid of the toilet, make me sit down, and go to work... meaning she would scrub my cut or scrape with a wash cloth and warm soapy water, dry it with a towel, and then, after studying my wound for a time, would take the little glass stick out of the Mercurochrome bottle, and with painstaking care, would make a bunny with the red liquid, using my wound itself as part of the bunny's body, depending on if the wound looked more like an ear, a leg, or a big round tummy...

After years of thinking about this process my mother used of making bunnies from my wounds (which I eventually called "Betty Bunnies" because my mother's name was Betty), I began to realize that not only were these bunnies imprinted on my knees and elbows, but also on my heart and mind and spirit, providing for me a **pattern** to live

by when it came to responding to any kind of wounds, whether they be mine or the wounds of others... a pattern that had to do with **paying attention**, with **tending to what needed to be done** for the sake of healing, and with **bringing to the whole venture a sense of creativity and imagination**, with the hope of transforming the wound into something life-giving and whole...

And while I often fall short of the lessons my mother's Betty Bunnies offered to teach me, I can still feel the imprint of those bunnies on my life, and sometimes see them hopping across my knees, elbows and heart even now...

And I speak of these Betty Bunnies this morning and the pattern of paying attention, tending, and creating they imprinted on my life because I think the risen Jesus was up to the same thing in his encounter with Cleopas and his companion in the story we just heard read from Luke's Gospel; the story often called "The Road to Emmaus"... That is, I think Jesus was trying to imprint a **pattern** on their hearts and minds, their hands and voices, so that when Jesus was no longer with them, they would be able to follow the pattern in all they said and did...

Clearly, as the story begins, Cleopas and his companion are carrying deep sorrow, grief, confusion, and the wounds of disappointment and despair in the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion just three days before... According to the story, it is the evening on the very day when the women had gone to the tomb and found it empty, returning to the disciples without seeing Jesus, and carrying with them only the words spoken by the angels who had told them that Jesus was indeed alive...

An astounding proclamation of resurrection that then sent Peter running to the tomb, hoping no doubt to see the risen Jesus, but yielding for him only the linen cloths in which Jesus had been buried lying by themselves...

According to Luke's narrative, it is later on that same day that Cleopas and his companion decided to walk to Emmaus, a small town of little consequence, seven miles from Jerusalem... And it was on that walk when, unbeknownst to them, the risen Jesus joined them and listened to Cleopas and his companion speak of their despair and their dashed hopes, their deep wounds of disappointment that Jesus did not turn out to be the one to redeem Israel after all; that is, to set Israel free from their oppression at the hands of the Roman Empire...

It was then, as Luke tells us, that Jesus, keenly aware of the grief and despair they were carrying, began tending to their wounds by opening **for them** and imprinting **on them** the pattern that runs throughout the story of Moses and the words of the prophets... a **pattern** centered on liberation again and again and again... a pattern intent on breaking the many forms of bondage that had kept the people of Israel from living into the fulness of life for which they had been created by God and to which they were called...

Bondage to Egypt, bondage to Babylon, bondage to their own self-destructive tendencies and their insatiable desire to have more, to control more, to be more... All of these forms of bondage requiring a kind of death to the old for the sake of the new... a breaking open of the shell that "was" for the sake of what "could be"... a passage through the Reed Sea, through the wilderness, through exile, through death for the

sake of life... The very same pattern Jesus had modeled in his life, death and resurrection...

Although neither Cleopas or his companion could see this... At least not until Jesus took bread, and with it, made clear the pattern of his life and the life of those who would follow him... the pattern of blessing, breaking, and sharing...

It was in the blessing, the breaking and the sharing of bread that they recognized him...

... the same pattern that had shaped Jesus' life...

Blessing, breaking, sharing...

Blessing, breaking, sharing...

With the breaking at the center,

at the heart of it all...

The breaking down, +

The breaking forth,

The breaking into,

The breaking out of,

The breaking open...

Blessing, breaking, sharing,

A trinity of verbs created for life

By way of death,

By way of breaking the old form

so something new can emerge...

Life dependent on letting go of what was and is for the sake of something yet to be,

Becoming...

Ask the milkweed in the field,

The tadpole in the pond,

The loaf on the table,

The God in the heavens (where people so love to Keep "him" intact and whole and mighty in battle...)

Ask any of them, and they will tell you

It all depends on breaking,

Because, as you will remember,

In the multiplication of loaves,

Division came first...

The breaking open before the breaking forth...

The pattern of life in the kingdom of God.

The pattern of life Jesus longed to imprint on

those who would follow him...

Including Cleopas and his companion, overcome as they were by grief and despair... **A pattern Jesus imprinted on them not for the sake of breaking, nor for the sake of dying, but for the sake of the fulness**

of life, for the sake of joy... The joy those two Emmaus disciples must have known for at least a moment, as Luke tells us their hearts **burned within them** when they finally saw what Jesus longed for them to see...

No wonder one theologian has said he wishes Luke had written a second part to this story... One that might be called “The Road **From** Emmaus,” so we might learn how the pattern Jesus had imprinted on Cleopas and his companion transformed their lives over the long haul...

Although we never hear about these two particular followers of Jesus again, beyond their return to Jerusalem the next day with the amazing news about their encounter with the risen Jesus... Although we never hear about these two followers of Jesus again, my guess, from what we learn in the book of Acts, which is the sequel to Luke’s Gospel, is that despite the pattern of blessing, breaking and sharing that Jesus tried to imprint on Cleopas and his companion (and subsequently on the lives of any of those who expressed a desire to follow him), that pattern was often forgotten or dismissed, because the old forms can be so comfortable, and the old patterns can be so hard to break...

Certainly this was true for the people of Israel, who, when traveling through the wilderness after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, longed for the “good old days” of cucumbers and leeks when they were Pharaoh’s slaves...

As it is true for circus elephants, who, after being chained and trained to go in a circle holding one another’s tails, will continue to do so even after those chains have been removed...

As it is true for the pastor who was so bound by her need to write the perfect sermon, she refused, on beautiful Saturday afternoons in

summer to take the hand of her beautiful husband and to accept his invitation to put up the sails and catch the wind on Penobscot Bay...

The pattern of blessing, breaking and sharing that Jesus longs to imprint on our hearts and our lives is so easy to refuse, just as the pattern of my mother's Betty Bunnies is still something I so often forget or choose to ignore...

Which is why, this morning, as we walk the Road to Emmaus on this third Sunday of Easter, it might be helpful for each of us to think about what we could carry with us to open our eyes and soften our hearts to receive the pattern Jesus longs to imprint on our lives...

As for me, I would bring three things...

Given the riotous song of the little frogs known as peepers singing from the ponds, swamps and low-lying areas of Downeast Maine right now, I would bring the little verse I always take from my files this time of year... A verse that goes like this...

Unless a tadpole stills its gills and dies to underwater ways,

It remains a silent voice in the choir of "peeper praise."

But if it lets go of gills, take a chance and takes a breath,

It will find a song inside where it feared was only death.

And then, oh then, what once was still will lift its voice to heav'n above,

Filling falling dark'ning dusk with God's Easter song of love.

Secondly, I would bring a recording of “Brahms’ Requiem,” which, as many of you know, we are studying during our Wednesday morning Bible study from now until Pentecost with the Reverend Tim Ensworth as our leader...

The study is called “Sowing Tears, Reaping Joy,” and as Tim reminded us this past Wednesday, at the heart of Brahms’ “Requiem” is the strange, paradoxical, and totally mystifying Gospel message from Matthew 5, “Blessed are those who mourn”... Or to use a different translation, “Happy are those who carry sorrow”... and the equally incomprehensible message from Psalm 126, “Those who wept when they went out carrying the seed will come back singing for joy”...

Both messages being so counterintuitive and so hard to make sense of, especially for anyone in the throes of grief, we recognized last Wednesday that it will take us all six weeks of our study of Brahms’ “Requiem” to see what Brahms was hoping all mourners would come to see when he wrote what many consider to be his greatest work...

But it is, I think, the very same thing that Jesus was hoping Cleopas, his companions, and all his followers would come not only to see, but to pattern their lives after ... something about the **joy** and the **fulness of life** that comes by way of blessing, breaking and sharing... with the “breaking,” the mourning, and the dying being at the heart of it all...

(Can you imagine what might have happened...

- if the pastor referred to just a moment ago had broken free from her need to write the perfect sermon on summer Saturday afternoons, and had accepted her beautiful husband’s invitation to raise the sails in the sun and the wind on Penobscot Bay?...

Can you imagine what might happen...

- if we could break free of the tendency to take ourselves so darn seriously, and just spend an afternoon now and then flying kites, or playing catch, or making Betty Bunnies on the scrapes and cuts of those we love?

Can you imagine what might happen

- if any of us could break free of the fears and the hard cold shells that hold us in bondage, and instead share our lives, our bread, our hearts, our hopes, and yes, even our fears with our neighbors, our families, our neighbors... our enemies?)

All of which involves a kind of breaking, a kind of dying, a kind of sharing of self which is pretty much impossible for me to do most of the time... which is why the third thing I would carry with me on the Road to Emmaus is the reminder that following Jesus is not only about the imprint of a pattern on our lives, but an imprint of a **promise** as well...

A promise that we do not travel the Road to Emmaus bearing our wounds and despair and fear alone, but with the God whose presence and essence, whose purpose and passion is most profoundly made known in the incarnate love of Jesus, who for us, for you and for me, and for the world God so loves, continues God's pattern of love in a thousand thousand ways, but most viscerally and particularly in the breaking of the bread... Jesus' body blessed, broken and put into our empty hands, sharing with us the love that with great tenderness tends to our wounds so we too might tend to the wounds of the world in the name and the way of Jesus...

It is said that Jesus was buried as one single man, and rose as a people, all of them part of the body of Christ... We are among those people, dear friends... so let us go out from here imprinted with the love of God made known in Jesus, bearing little bottles of Mercurochrome in our hands and the song of the peepers on our lips...

Because if we let go of gills, take a chance and take a breath,

We will find a song inside where we fear is only death.

And then, oh then, what once was still will lift its voice to heav'n above,

Filling falling dark'ning dusk with God's Easter song of love.